

Third Centennial News Release

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Batavia officially became a city on January 1, 1915, after having been an incorporated village since 1823. The Transition involved a progression through several steps during 1914. During 2014, I will be recalling each of these events 100 years after their occurrence.

Early in 1914, Village of Batavia Aldermen, the equivalent of today's City Council, had become unhappy with the work of a Charter Revision Commission appointed several years earlier. The Commission had developed a proposal for Batavia becoming a city that eliminated wards, eliminated political parties, and established a government run by a manager and five councilmen elected at large. As a result, the Aldermen wrote a competing proposal and presented it to the community on February 4, 1914. Then the Aldermen announced that their proposal would be submitted to a straw vote in order to gauge community support. That vote took place 100 years ago, today.

Voters might have anticipated that the ballot would provide an opportunity to indicate which proposal they preferred, the Commission's as described above, or the Aldermen's proposal which retained wards, retained partisan politics, and featured a mayor rather than a city manager. Instead, the ballot simply read, "Shall the charter as prepared by the Aldermen be sent to Albany?"

Since the Commission's proposal was already in Albany, a "yes" vote could only indicate a voter's desire to have both proposals presented before the State legislature. The wording on the ballot did not allow for a clear understanding of how voters assessed the relative merits of the two proposals. However, when voters cast 488 "yes" votes versus 451 "no" votes, the Aldermen chose to see the results as a ringing endorsement of their proposal over that of the Commission.

A month from now, I will provide another news release, this time reporting on what happened when the two competing proposals were presented to a joint committee of Senators and Assemblymen.